

Message Text

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ACTION SCSE-00

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R 241203Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5420

UNCLAS ACCRA 8617

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: CGEN

SUBJ: ABSENTEE VOTING ABROAD: POST-MORTEM SURVEY

1. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT OVERSEAS CITIZENS VOTING RIGHTS ACT OF 1975 (PULBIC LAW 94-203) SUCCESSFUL IN GIVING MORE AMCITS ABROAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO REGISTER AND VOTE IN RECENT PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION.

2. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE, EMBASSY WISHES TO POINT OUT FACTOR WHICH INHIBITED EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACT. A FEW OF THE STATES, NOTABLY ILLINOIS, NEW JERSEY AND CALIFORNIA, MAILED OUT ABSENTEE BALLOTS AT SUCH A LATE DATE AS EFFECTIVELY TO DISENFRANCHISE THE VOTER. AS THE DEPARTMENT IS AWARE, INTERNATIONAL MAIL FROM THE U.S. TO WEST AFRICA IS PAINFULLY SLOW. AVERAGE AIRMAIL LETTER TAKES 2 WEEKS TO ARRIVE FROM THE EAST AND MIDWESTERN U.S. AND 3 WEEKS FROM THE WEST COAST. APPROXIMATELY 40 BALLOTS, WHICH ARRIVED IN ACCRA ONLY A WEEK BEFORE THE ELDCTION, WERE RETURNED TO THE STATES VIA AMCIT PASSENGERS ON PAMAM'S DIRECT WEEKLY FLIGHT. IF THESE CITIZENS HAD TO DEPEND ON INTERNATIONAL MAIL OR THE DEPARTMENT'S POUCH SERVICE, SURELY ANOTHER LARGE GROUP WOULD HAVE BEEN DISENFRANCHISED. THOSE BALLOTS RECEIVED AFTER THE AFOREMENTIONED OCTOBER 25 FLIGHT DEPARTED ACCRA WERE ALMOST SURELY NOT RETURNED BY NOVEMBER 2. EVEN NOW THE OCCASIONAL BALLOT DRIFTS IN.

3. ASIDE FROM STATES LISTED ABOVE, CONOFF RECEIVED SIMILAR COMPLAINTS FROM AMCITS REGISTERED IN FLORIDA, WISCONSIN, MAINE, NEW HAMPSHIRE, MASSACHUSETTS AND NORTH
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CAROLINA. EMBASSY WISHES TO POINT OUT SITUATION IN ORDER

THAT DEPARTMENT MAY INFORM STATE ELECTION OFFICIALS OF
DELAYS IN INTERNATIONAL MAIL SERVICE. IDEALLY, BALLOTS
SHOULD BE MAILED TO REGISTERED INDIVIDUALS NOT LESS THAN
ONE MONTH BEFORE ELECTION DAY. IN FUTURE EMBASSY WILLING
TO ASSIST BY CONTINUING PRACTICE OF COLLECTING BALLOTS AND
RETURNING THEM WITH U.S. CITIZENS BOARDING DIRECT FLIGHT
TO U.S.

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